

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Revisiting Learner-Centered Ideology, Management, and Paradigm



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Dear Editor,

As we know, the educational curriculum refers to academic content taught in schools or a collection of lessons, assessments, or a particular program or course taken on by students (Alanazi, 2016). Granting it is essential to note what a curriculum will achieve, what students will do and use to learn, and what teachers will use to teach the class; however, as to Crowley (2021), the curriculum is in no way neutral – it, at all times, mirrors ideological views.

From a learner-centered ideology, it is presumed that education manifests itself in drawing out people's inherent goodness and capabilities for growth (Schiro, 2013, pp. 5–6). As a teacher wanting to operate in this ideology, I believe the learners have their own abilities for growth. This ideology is all about bringing out the competency within them. On the other hand, classrooms are busy public places; events are unpredictable (Ming-tak & Wai-shing, 2013, pp. 10–11). This requires the teachers to develop their range of classroom management strategies. Setting up a classroom is an essential part of teaching and learning. It involves designing the classroom atmosphere, rules, and expectations (Williamson, 2008, p. 3). Granting there is no sole way of managing a wide array of classrooms, fruitful classroom management is tied to student engagement and empowerment (Honigsfeld & Cohan, 2014).

Classroom management practices can be seen from teacher-centered to student-centered (Garett, 2008). Only when the attempts of student-centered management fail should teachers have to resort to controlling or

intervention strategies (Ming-tak & Wai-shing, 2013, p. 1). Teachers must learn several things about themselves as managers of the classroom. Likewise, teachers must also learn about their students as individuals and show them they are cared for in many different ways (Williamson, 2008, p. 21–22). Undeniably, many teachers have a tough time voluntarily ceasing and surrendering control in the classroom.

Part of the problem is that they might not recognize the process to be accounted for. Positively, it is not giving up control but allowing the students to control themselves to the expectations presented in the room. Letting students at all grade levels be empowered in the room will enable them to make better choices (Williamson, 2008, p. 28–29). Teachers are crucial in crafting essential decisions – to provide instruction or produce learning. These perspectives – instruction or learning paradigm – genuinely affect how teachers introduce themselves in front of the class (Barr & Tagg, 1995, p. 16). Although providing instructions and producing powerful learning environments may seem different from the issue of classroom management, it cannot be denied that it supports each other. In a case study conducted by Garett (2008), the three elementary teacher-participants who were operating in a student-centered manner of giving instructions and producing learning environments, in some cases, used teacher-centered classroom management strategies. This implies various ways to supplement the learning environment with management strategies.

According to Biggs and Tang (2011, pp. 17–20), there are three levels of thinking about teaching. The first, blaming learners, focusing on what the student is. Here, if students do not learn, it is not that it is whatsoever improper with the teaching, but that students are incompetent, uninterested, or with some defect. The second, blaming the teacher, focusing on what the teachers do. The third focuses on what the student does. It is a student-centered model of teaching, with teaching supporting learning. Except learning takes place, expert instructions are immaterial and irrelevant.

The third level of thinking about teaching captures the learning paradigm. A learner-centered paradigm advocate must not end on just reading and knowing the learner-centered curriculum ideology itself; instead, the paradigm must drive them. The learning paradigm must capture them. As stated by Barr and Tagg (1995), “For many of us, the learning paradigm has always lived in our hearts... But the heart’s feelings have not lived clearly and powerfully in our heads” (Barr & Tagg, 1995, p. 14). In a learner-centered class, students do not depend on teachers all the time for approval, instructions, correction, or praise. Students do not disregard each other but look at each other and communicate. When in doubt or difficulty, students seek the teacher’s advice, but only after they have made an effort among themselves to solve problems. Working together is the emphasis, e.g., by pairs, groups, and/or as a whole class. Also, students may be teacher-led in a student-centered class. The teacher will clarify important things and/or give some practice before working together. Teachers will be available to provide advice and encouragement while students work together. After finishing the work together, their teacher will provide them with feedback, suggestions and entertain questions. The bigger the class, the more obligatory it is to have a learner-centered class (Jones, 2007, pp. 4–5). We may not even reach some students in a jam-packed classroom as we circulate. It is not easy to monitor and participate in activities simultaneously. Should we take part in class discussions as equal partners? Continuous interference is not likely to encourage students’ autonomous academic-related behaviors.

Some people are more dominant, outgoing, opinionated and/or imaginative than others. Sometimes others sit and listen, getting bored or feeling frustrated. In other cases, one student is happy to be a “passenger”. Reshuffling groups methodically can help. Shyer and introvert learners must not constantly be combined in a single group. It may be of value to get rid of the dominant, bossy, and/or influential ones from each group and assign them all together when one student has dominated each group. On the other hand, some may not aspire to voice out argument or lack certainty; they may not yearn to talk much. In this case, teach students schemes, to inspire them to speak more like asking follow-up questions (Jones, 2007, p. 9).

It is necessary to provide powerful learning environments as a paradigm rather than merely providing instructions. It is highly substantial to note that expert teaching comprises mastery over different teaching techniques.

The learning paradigm resolves the ends, not just improving the means. Learner-centered ideology was not created just as an espoused theory (i.e., set of ideologies people propose to explicate actions), but also as a theory-in-use (i.e., ideologies we can conclude from how individuals behave) (Barr and Tagg, 1995, p. 14). If the students do not learn, do not instantly blame them and tell them that they are incapable, unmotivated, or even possess an academic defect. Instead, focus on what the student does and how it relates to teaching, integrating teaching and learning.

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